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ABSTRACT

In an effort to determine if Indian and white adolescents differed in their choice of defense mechanisms, a random sampling of tenth, eleventh and twelfth grade students from 22 Oklahoma public schools were given the Defense Mechanism Inventory. Scores for 170 Indian students and 197 white students assessed five categories of defenses: turning against object, projection, principalization, turning against self, and reversal. No significant differences were determined in any of the five defense categories for Indian and white females. However, differences in choice of defensive strategies were evident for Indian and white males in two categories. Towards the end of the adolescent stage white males were seen to utilize defenses which dealt with conflict through attacking a real or presumed external frustration object more frequently than did Indian males; Indian males did not choose to turn their aggressions and frustrations toward an external frustrating object with the same frequency. When faced with anxiety producing situations contained within the test, Indian males tended to use denial, repression and reaction formation with a higher frequency than did white males. Indian child-rearing practices may facilitate the development of defensive strategies that involve turning aggression toward an external object. (DS)

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TO IMPROVING INDIAN EDUCATION

REACTIONS TO FRUSTRATION AND ANXIETY BY INDIAN AND WHITE ADOLESCENTS

by

James C. Martin

The psychological adjustment of the American Indian has been described by such authors as Teft,[1] Kennedy,[2] Allen,[3] and Bryde.[4] It was reported that the American Indian has experienced much alienation, hopelessness, powerlessness, depression, anxiety, and frustration. The Coleman[5] study reported that Indian children felt that they were not as powerful as whites in affecting their own environments and futures. Other researchers (Hobart[6] and Saslow and Harrover[7]) have identified the poor psychological adjustment of Indian students, as a principal cause for underachievement in school.

In analyzing the adolescent's reaction to frustration, helplessness, disappointment, and anxiety, Cole and Hall[8] report methods or patterns to be used in escaping or resolving conflict. These patterns used by individuals to cope with reality and conflict have been traditionally referred to as defense mechanisms. Cole and Hall identify one type of defense mechanism as repression, which allows the individual to deny the existence of a conflict-producing situation. Other types of defense mechanisms, such as rationalization, allow the individual to distort reality in an effort to cope with a particular situation. An individual may also retreat from reality by employing fantasy. Many psychologists agree that an individual may utilize all or only a select few of the possible defense mechanisms throughout life. The adolescent stage of a person's life is a very important developmental phase and the present study attempted to determine if Indian and white adolescents differed in their choice of defense mechanisms. In addition, the present study attempted to determine if Indian-white differences in choice of defense mechanisms was a function of age or grade levels.

SAMPLING

Twenty-two public schools in northeastern Oklahoma were selected for participating in the study. The 22 schools were selected because of their high Indian enrollment during the 1975-76 school year and accessibility. Within each school, samples of Indian students and white students were selected randomly from grades ten, eleven, and twelve. The students were then administered the *Defense Mechanism Inventory*[9] in group settings. Indian students were defined as those students who were one-quarter or more degree Indian blood. Scores on the *Defense Mechanism Inventory* (DMI) were obtained from a total of 170 Indian students and 197 white students. Of the 170 Indian students, 78 were male and 92 were female. The sample of white students consisted of 95 males and 102 females.

INSTRUMENTS

The *Defense Mechanism Inventory* (DMI) consists of ten stories or situations followed by four questions related to the type of behavior, thoughts, and feelings that the story evokes in the respondent. The Inventory assesses five categories of defenses and yields a summative score for each category. The summative scores represent the relative strength of the respondent's self-reported tendency to adopt various types of defensive strategies. Gleser and Ihilevich[9] describe the five clusters of defenses as follows:

1. *Turning against Object* (TAO). This class of defenses deals with conflict through attacking a real or presumed external frustrating object. Such classical defenses as identification-with-the-aggressor and displacement can be placed in this category.

2. *Projection* (PRO). Included here are defenses which justify the expression of aggression toward an external object through first attributing to it, without unequivocal evidence, negative intent or characteristics.

3. *Principalization* (PRN). This class of defenses deals with conflict through invoking a general principle that "splits off" affect from content and represses the former. Defenses such as intellectualization, isolation, and rationalization fall into this category.

4. *Turning against Self* (TAS). In this class are those defenses that handle conflict through directing aggressive behavior towards S himself. Masochism and autosadism are examples of defensive solutions in this category.

5. *Reversal* (REV). This class includes defenses that deal with conflict by responding in a positive or neutral fashion to a frustration object which might be expected to evoke a negative reaction. Defenses such as negation, denial, reaction formation, and repression are subsumed under this category. (Gleser and Ihilevich, 1969, p. 52)

RESULTS

In an effort to determine if Indian and white adolescents differed in their choice of defense mechanisms, t-tests were computed between mean DMI scores for Indian and white adolescents. The results of the analysis are presented in Table I. Table I depicts the results of the tests for differences between Indian and white adolescents' DMI scores by sex. From Table I, it can be seen that the Indian males' mean DMI score was significantly lower than the white males' mean DMI score

for the turning-against-object category of defense mechanisms. Indian males scored significantly higher than white males in the reversal category of defense mechanisms. Overall, it appears that Indian male adolescents tended to choose defensive strategies such as identification-with-the-aggressor and displacement less frequently than did white male adolescents. Also, Indian males tended to choose defensive strategies such as denial and repression more frequently than did white males. For the defense categories of projection, principalization, and turning against self, no significant differences were found between mean DMI scores for Indian male adolescents and white male adolescents. Finally, Table I shows that no significant differences were found between mean DMI scores for Indian and

TABLE I
TEST FOR DIFFERENCES BETWEEN INDIAN AND WHITE ADOLESCENTS' DMI SCORES BY SEX

	Males						Females					
Category	N	df	X	SD	t	P	N	df	X	SD	t	P
TAO												
Indian subjects	78	171	38.47	11.4	2.93	.05	92	192	34.50	10.5	.49	n.s.
white subjects	95		43.13	8.4			102		35.23	10.1		
PRO												
Indian subjects	78	171	39.22	6.1	1.64	n.s.	92	192	37.35	6.2	.19	n.s.
white subjects	95		40.91	7.3			102		37.52	5.9		
INT												
Indian subjects	78	171	42.83	6.2	.23	n.s.	92	192	45.57	6.6	.23	n.s.
white subjects	95		43.03	5.4			102		45.36	5.9		
TAS												
Indian subjects	78	171	37.26	6.1	1.54	n.s.	92	192	39.77	5.8	1.21	n.s.
white subjects	95		35.77	6.5			102		40.74	5.4		
REV												
Indian subjects	78	171	42.22	9.3	4.11	.05	92	192	42.82	10.0	1.16	n.s.
white subjects	95		36.79	8.0			102		41.16	9.8		

white females. Apparently, Indian and white female adolescents did not significantly differ in the frequency of their choice of any of the five defense categories.

Taking the two defense categories in which Indian and white males tended to differ, the data were treated with additional analyses to determine if differences were evident at all grade levels. Table II shows the results of tests for differences between Indian male and whtie male adolescents' DMI scores by grade level. From Table II it can be seen that, upon further analysis, the significant difference previously found for the turning against object category was evident for only the eleventh-grade students. When holding grade level constant, the DMI scores for tenth- and twelfth-grade Indian and white males did not differ significantly. It appears that in the tenth

and twelfth grades the Indian males' mean DMI score was not significantly lower than the white males' mean DMI score. In contrast, however, the significant difference previously reported for the reversal category was evident for all grade levels. At grades ten, eleven, and twelve, the mean DMI score for Indian males was significantly higher than the mean DMI score for white males.

In a final analysis, the present study sought to determine if the data contained any trends that might be related to age. More specifically, the data were analyzed to determine if the mean DMI scores for Indian and white male adolescents increased or decreased with age. This analysis was completed for only those defense categories which resulted in significant, overall differences, namely the turning against object and reversal categories. Figure I shows the mean DMI scores for Indian and white males as a function of age. For the TAO category, the mean DMI score for white males steadily increased with age. The mean TAO score for Indian males also, after an initial decline, tended to increase with age. However, the means for the 16, 17, and 18 year-old Indians were lower than the corresponding means for the white males. For the reversal category, the mean DMI scores for white males gradually decreased with age. The mean reversal scores for Indian males gradually increased with age.

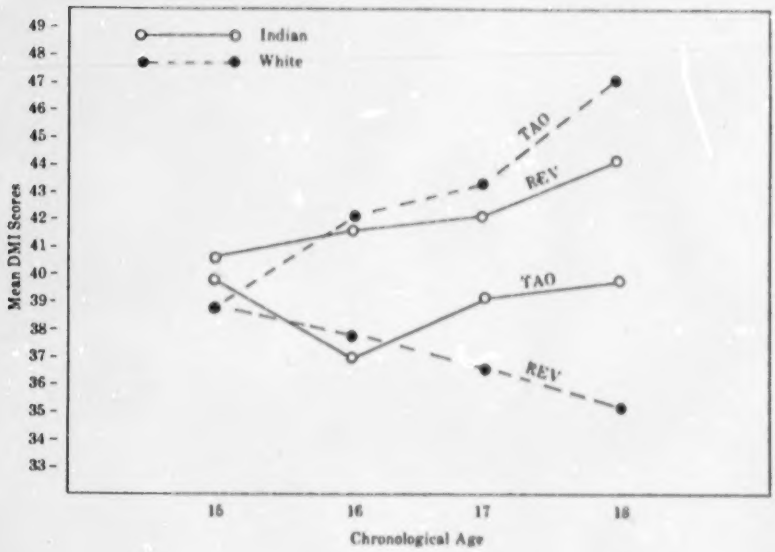
DISCUSSION

From Table I, it appears that the present sample of Indian and white female adolescents did not differ in their choice of any of the five defense categories. Overall, it seems that when faced with the situations contained within the DMI, Indian females do not use any of these defense categories with a significantly higher or lower frequency than do white females. For males, the present study found that Indian and white adolescents differed in the turning against

TABLE II
TEST FOR DIFFERENCES BETWEEN INDIAN AND WHITE MALES' DMI SCORES BY GRADE LEVEL

			Turning against object				Reversal			
Category	**N**	**df**	**X**	**SD**	**t**	**P**	**X**	**SD**	**t**	**P**
Tenth Grade										
Indian subjects	26	50	36.42	11.7	1.51	n.s.	42.73	9.6	2.15	.05
white subjects	26		40.73	8.7			37.42	8.1		
Eleventh Grade										
Indian subjects	27	64	40.04	10.1	2.14	.05	40.19	8.1	2.17	.05
white subjects	39		45.00	8.6			35.64	8.6		
Twelfth Grade										
Indian subjects	25	53	38.92	12.5	1.21	n.s.	43.88	10.0	2.62	.05
white subjects	30		42.77	10.9			37.73	7.4		

FIGURE I
MEAN DMI SCORES AS A FUNCTION OF CHRONOLOGICAL AGE
(Indian and white males)



object and reversal categories. For the present sample of Indian and white adolescents, Indian males tended to choose the turning against object category with a lower frequency than did white males. However, the Indian males tended to choose the reversal category with a higher frequency than did white males. Upon further analysis, it was found that the Indian-white differences in turning against object scores was significant for only the eleventh grade. Therefore, when holding grade level constant, only eleventh-grade Indian and white males differed in their choice of this category. It seems that eleventh-grade white males tended to use strategies such as displacement more often than did Indian males. In terms of the reversal category, Indian males scored higher than white males at grades ten, eleven, and twelve. For the present sample of adolescents, Indian males tended to choose defensive strategies such as denial, reaction formation, and repression more often than did white males.

The present study also examined the data for trends. From the analysis, it seemed that the choice of defensive strategies such as identification-with-the-aggressor and displacement tended to increase with age for white males. For Indian males, the choice of these types of defenses also tended to increase with age, but at a lower rate. In examining the development of reversal defenses such as denial and repression, it was found that the choice of these defenses

tended to increase with age for Indian males. On the other hand, the white males' choice of these types of defenses tended to decrease with age.

For the present sample of Indian and white adolescents, it was concluded that Indian-white differences in choice of defensive strategies was evident for males in two categories of defenses. Based on the situations contained within the DMI, it seems that towards the end of the adolescent stage white males tend to utilize defenses which deal with conflict through attacking a real or presumed external frustration object more frequently than do Indian males. When attempting to cope with anxiety-producing situations, it seems that Indian males did not choose to turn their aggression and frustration towards an external frustrating object with the same frequency as did white males. It could be that the Indian culture in northeastern Oklahoma promotes an attitude of not attacking an external object or person when frustrated. It could be that Indian child-rearing practices inhibit the development of defensive strategies which involve turning aggression towards an external object. The present study further concluded that chronological age, rather than grade level, is closer related to the development of these types of defense mechanisms. It seems that the frequency of choosing of defense mechanisms such as displacement increases with age for both Indian and white males. However, the rate of increase tends to be higher for whites than Indians. It could be that by early adulthood Indian and white males are far apart in their willingness to utilize these types of defensive strategies.

The present study further concluded that Indian and white male adolescents differed in their choice of defenses such as denial, repression, and reaction formation. When faced with the anxiety-producing situations contained within the DMI, Indian males tended to use these types of defensive strategies with a higher frequency than did white males. It appears that as Indian males enter early adulthood they may favor utilizing these types of defenses when dealing with frustration and anxiety while white males do not. Again, the child-rearing practices of Indian parents may facilitate the development of these reversal-type defense mechanisms. Perhaps during early childhood or adolescence the Indian male develops a tendency to handle conflict-producing situations by simply denying the actual existence of the situation or by subconsciously repressing it.

The hypotheses and conclusions of the present study were based on the data obtained from the sample of Indian and white adolescents from northeastern Oklahoma. The results and conclusions may not apply to other Indian and white adolescents found outside of northeastern Oklahoma. Replication of the present study, with a larger sample, is recommended.

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